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## Leisure and the Racing of National Populism

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**Leisure and the Racing of National Populism**

This is the introduction to the Special Issue on “Leisure and the G/local Challenges to National Populist Politics”

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**Openings**

We introduce this special issue on “Leisure Cultures and G/local Challenges to National Populist Politics” with a particular example: the exhibition of Deborah Roberts’ artwork *O! Say Can’t You See*, which featured in the show *Sidelined* at Gallerie Lelong and Co. in New York City in 2018. It illustrates the complex circumstances and rich forms in which the challenges, ambiguities and resistances we focus on in this collection play out in/through the realm of leisure.

The visit of one of us (Stanley Thangaraj) to the gallery offered a timely and provocative way with which we start this paper. Lelong is the New York branch of an international art business. It boasts that it “diversifies dominant understandings of modern and contemporary art” (<http://www.galerielelong.com/gallery>), while making its money by representing lucrative well-established artists. It is located in the gentrified area of Chelsea, where working-class communities, immigrants, and communities of color once lived alongside large industries and factories, and near the river piers that once famously served as gay cruising spots (Manalansan 2005; Matthew 2005). The area has now been strategically transformed and sanitized—the stately gallery itself is a converted factory—becoming a major retail, art, and financial district serving the needs of corporate capital and bourgeois white sensibilities. We begin the discussion of this paper with a deliberate interrogation of *Sidelined* as a way to reference the ways that leisure, national populism, and protest spill into other arenas; to capture the dialectical relationship between power, resistance, and leisure cultures; to demonstrate how processes of national populism and its relationship to leisure bleed into every day representational and cultural spaces; and to address the ways that leisure provides a space for representation of key social phenomena and significant social actors. Whereas sport is often seen and removed from the realm of art, beginning with a review of the art exhibit extrapolates the links between art, representation, pleasure, and power (Pringle *et al*, 2015). In particular, the art exhibit, *Sidelined*, allows us to decipher both a micro-level and macro-level analysis of leisure and national populism.

While the location and aesthetic of the gallery bespeak and invite white-dominated art consumption as a leisure activity, *Sidelined* itself references a different realm of activity, cultural production and politics (see Saha, 2018). The installation was inspired by the protests of the

National [American] Football League’s (NFL) Colin Kaepernick (Burin, 2018; Thangaraj, 2017).

In 2016, in conversation with and informed by the BlackLivesMatter movement, Kaepernick (then of the San Francisco 49ers) refused to kneel during the pre-game US national anthem as a way to call attention to serious racial issues in United States society. This, in turn, inspired others – athletes and non-athletes – to follow his lead. The title of the art show, *Sidelined*, refers at once to the location of players’ protests (which took place at the edges of the gridirons by the team benches); to the sidelining of Kaepernick’s career (given that NFL team owners have refused to sign him since); and to the ways through which Donald Trump, NFL owners, white nationalists, and everyday people have dismissed, or sidelined, acts of protest and calls for justice (Flaherty, 2017; Futterman & Mather, 2018; Willingham, 2017). In different ways, Roberts and the other artists in the show address this dialectical relationship between power and protest, conjuring up the many ways that sport and leisure spaces, cultures and structures become one site for the articulation and contestation of politics locally, nationally, and globally (Carrington, 2012; Hartmann 2003; James 2005; Rand, 2011).

Roberts’ *O! Say Can’t You See*, a mixed media artwork on paper (2017, reproduced at <http://www.galerieelong.com/exhibitions/sidelined/selected-works?view=slider#2>), disrupts and queers the historical and sporting archive by assembling divergently gendered and raced black sporting bodies. Roberts presents what appears to be a young black girl’s face atop a dress made out of African-inspired fabric and a skirt suggesting the stripes of the U.S. flag. Limbs and feet extend out. The legs could belong to the young girl, but the feet and one arm, adult-sized and varied in skin tone, anatomically cannot. The parts and the whole gesture in different directions. The arm with the fist, for example, calls up Black Power, but also suggests Adam’s fist on

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3 Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling, with an odd suggestion of limp-wristedness on the muscled form.

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6 The ring on the girl's eye suggests injury, although her gaze is steady. Roberts writes in the artist's  
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8 statement on her website that she is "interested in the way young girls symbolize vulnerability but  
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10 also a naïve strength" (<http://www.deborahrobertsart.com/artist-statement/>).

11  
12 The title of Roberts' work, especially in the context of *Sidelined*, invites us to think about  
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14 the gendered and raced body in the nation state. *O! Say Can't You See* plays on "O' say can you  
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16 see?", the opening line of the US national anthem that refers to the US flag, and hence to the US  
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18 itself, prevailing through military battle. Significantly, the national anthem is central to the role of  
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20 sporting protest, for it is during its performance that notable acts have taken place, from the African  
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22 American athletes on the Olympic medal podium in 1968 to Kaepernick and other leading sport  
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24 stars, such as soccer star Megan Rapinoe, at the current time. Roberts' work asks us to consider a  
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26 number of questions: What can or cannot the girl see as she looks out? What forces structure her  
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28 gaze, her possibilities? Is it overreaching to see in the tangle of black bodies the forces of the birth  
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30 to prison pipeline and the athletic industrial complex? What do we see in leisure practices when  
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32 we look at her, with her? What cannot we see? What can we create, embody, envision, and do?  
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34 These matters of looking, spectatorship, activity, and action—and the ways that race, racism, and  
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36 racialization necessarily factor in—shape the possibilities and limits of time and activities  
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38 understood as leisure and their contexts. Leisure presents possibilities for simultaneously seeing  
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40 and not seeing the socio-historical context aligned with national populism (be it progressive or  
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42 conservative). Roberts' work invites us to look beyond the meritocracy of leisure and sport to see  
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44 the larger structure of race and gender in political formations.  
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The papers in this special issue spotlight practices of power and resistance with particular attention to the layers of racism and racialization to which this image, in context, gestures. We focus, in particular, on the sometimes predictable, sometimes contradictory and conflictual, uses of leisure by a wide array of actors in order to garner or challenge a populist agenda. As US and UK based scholars, our examples of this relationship are specific to our local contexts. We are informed by these examples, while trying to expand the relationship between leisure and national populism on a global scale. For instance, to entrench his national populist agenda, Donald Trump has been on the offensive by highlighting the actions of Colin Kaepernick and protesting athletes – which are framed by Trump and his acolytes as unpatriotic and disloyal to the military and uniformed services – to amass public, especially conservative, white supremacist support. Most notably, in September 2017, Donald Trump ranted about the protests and called Colin Kaepernick a “son of a bitch” (Legum, 2017; Porter, 2017). Through such discourses, Trump mobilizes long histories of racism in the United States through the uber-patriotic realm of sport to demean the protests by chastising #BlackLivesMatter through the racialized othering of black mothering, children, and kinship. Artists, writers, musicians, and some of these protesting athletes, on the other hand, have played a pivotal role in eliciting support for the BlackLivesMatter campaign in order to challenge the racial stratification of US society (Price, 2016; Orejuela & Shonekan, 2018; Taylor, 2016; Zirin, 2016). Securing populist support (and forms of resistance) through various forms of leisure illustrates how hegemony and counter-hegemony operate across various g/local contexts (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), which we hope to unravel and deconstruct in this special issue.

**Framing the papers: authoritarian and populist political times**



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3 In framing the issues and problems addressed in this collection of papers, we wanted to highlight  
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6 both their inveterate genealogies, *and* the multitude ways that they are influenced and responsive  
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8 to the nuances of the contemporary political conjuncture. For this reason, we situate current  
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10 developments with a frame of authoritarian politics, populism, and increasing public resentment  
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12 and violence towards racialized and nationally-excluded Others.

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15 Thirty years ago, Stuart Hall wrote, with typical prescience, about an emerging populism  
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17 in British politics. Populism, for Hall, was:

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19 something more than the ability to secure electoral support for a political programme, a  
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22 quality all politicians in formal democracies must possess. I mean the project, central to  
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24 the politics of Thatcherism, to ground neoliberal policies directly in an appeal to “the  
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26 people”; to root them in the essentialist categories of commonsense experience and  
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29 practical moralism – and thus to construct, not simply awaken, classes, groups and interests  
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31 into a particular definition of “the people” (Hall, 1988, p.71).

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33 While Hall himself would caution against any superficial application of his ideas across different  
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35 historical epochs and geographical sites (Hall, 1979, 1990), the relevance of the above statement  
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37 to contemporary, global ‘unsettling times’ (Ahluwalia & Miller, 2016, p.454) is apparent. What  
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39 he offers us is a useful and provocative model with which to name how conceptions of “the people”  
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41 emerge in our current historical moment through a national populism that relies on, demands, and  
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45 secures sites of leisure.

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47 Since the election of President Trump in the United States and the Brexit vote in the UK,  
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49 along with the rise of radical-right movements in a significant number of European states (Gidron  
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52 & Hall, 2017) and in parts of the Global South, populism has increasingly been subject to scholarly  
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54 debate (see e.g. Dodd *et al*, 2017; Freeden, 2017, Ouellette & Banet-Weiser, 2018). However, the  
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meaning of populism remains contested and ambiguous, related to a range of ideological positions, discourses and practices. As Bart Bonikowski (2017) notes, populism has been conceptualized variously as an ideology, a method of political mobilization, and a discursive category. There is a degree of agreement among scholars as to its fundamental principles though. He states that:

Fundamentally, populism is a form of politics predicated on the moral vilification of elites and the veneration of ordinary people, who are seen as the sole legitimate source of political power. The specific elites targeted by populists vary depending on the populists' ideological predilections. While elected politicians are often the immediate targets, populism just as often focuses on economic leaders, civil servants and intellectuals, who are seen as exercising undue influence on politics in the pursuit of their own self-interest (Bonikowski, 2017, p. 184).

In the case of protest in sport, we see how political and corporate elites vilify the racialized minorities, women, and queer athletes who challenge the racial, gender, and sexual stratification in western nations. The athletes are conjured to have only self-interest and thus not speak to the masses. As a result, Trump strategically uses the case of protesting athletes as antithetical to the needs of “everyday” people, whereby creating (a)venues for governing (racial) national politics through affect (Berlant, 1997). Critically, nonetheless, populism does not provide the only intellectual explanation for the phenomena under analysis here. Bonikowski (2017) notes that while populism has become the preferred label to describe contemporary right-wing parties, this can actually obscure other important elements that underpin and emerge from radical-right politics, such as ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism. As Rogers Brubaker (2017, p.1191) argues, ‘the

present conjuncture is not simply populist; it is (with a few exceptions) national-populist' (see also Gusterson, 2017).

In fact, the processes of ensuring and securing a populist agenda have often required mobilizing various racial projects to re/construct imaginaries of the nation (Omi & Winant, 1994). In a Western European context, this has increasingly been taken up through far-right fascist ideologies in the name of "ordinary" white working-class communities: the so-called "left-behinds" (Bhabra, 2017). This rhetoric is evident in the politics and policies of Tom Van Grieken's Vlaams Belang Party in Belgium, Geertz Wilder's Dutch Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and Marine Le Pen's National Rally (formerly National Front) in France (Cammaerts, 2018; Harsin, 2018). "Exploiting the public's ignorance and ethnic and religious resentments" (Judis, 2016, p.120), they present an image of white working-class communities forced into silence by "femi-nazi" and/or anti-racist campaigners, and the so-called irrational, leftist "politically correct brigade" (Cammaerts, 2018). Such ideological posturing fosters a public sense of relief; a populist form of emotional affirmation and healing that the political elites are *finally* listening to the needs of "ordinary people" (Fraser, 2008). But this type of populist catharsis is merely symbolic (Azmanova, 2018). It does very little to disrupt the financial and social precariousness of those living in poverty, whether they be white working-class communities or people of color. Blaming socio-economic inequalities on people of colour and migrants is not only a falsification of material conditions, but also arguably serves to mask state machinations of neoliberal, white, able-bodied and hetero-patriarchal forms of social control and power (Fraser, 2008; Shilliam, 2018; Valluvan, 2017). By combining vertical (elites versus the people) and horizontal (insiders versus outsiders) axes of power, "internal outsiders" are re/cast as threats to the financial and social security of the nation (Brubaker, 2017).

For instance, whilst the Dutch Party for Freedom has narrated a long-history of openness to difference and liberal attitudes towards gender, sexuality, and drug cultures, the arrival of immigrants – particularly those of Muslim faith – nevertheless, has been used to demarcate the allochthonous (not from here) and the autochthonous (of here). For example, Dutch nationalist politician, Geert Wilders, racialized Moroccan immigrants as “scum” and thus *dangerous* “matter out of place” (Douglas, 2002) from within the nation-state (Goldman, 2017). The language utilised is significant; evoking racial, ethnic and religious differences in a form of what Wallerstein and Balibar (1991) call “cultural racism”, whilst simultaneously masking “race” as a marker of national inclusion and exclusion (Cammaerts, 2018; Valluvan, 2016). In addition, a form of pink-washing is at work here: the use of surface-level support for various civic and human rights, e.g. gay rights and gender rights (see Harsin, 2018; Hatfield, 2018; Puar, 2007) which abet and camouflage regressive politics. In this case, the presentation of a progressive and enlightened nation and national culture is used to vilify Muslim communities, purportedly eroding the nation from within by their supposedly “backward” fundamentalist values (see Abu-Lughod, 2013; Lenneis & Agergaard, 2018 [this volume]). We also recognize the rise in authoritarian and fundamentalist rule in places including India, Syria and the Philippines (Thangaraj, 2017), where religious and ethnic insularity and discrimination have given rise to a pernicious politics of division (Valluvan and Kapoor, 2016). These discords and manifestations of dispossession have fueled a rise in demands for redistribution of wealth and land based on citizenship rights or one’s socio-historical location within newly formed nation-states.

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The demarcation of racial, ethnic and religious insiders from outsiders in and through state authoritarian politics and policies thus gives rise to *ethno*-nationalist forms of populist politics. Bonikowski (2017, p.184) summarizes:

exclusionary forms of populism—that is, those that infuse populism with ethno-nationalist content—often employ more restrictive definitions of the polity, based on ethnic, racial, or religious criteria. In such formulations...it is not only elites who are vilified, but also various scapegoated minority groups, who are seen as having co-opted the elites for their own nefarious ends. It is in contrast with these unwelcome groups that the identity of the ‘true’ people becomes crystallized.

This entails the displacement of the values and content of race away from white working-class (stereotyped) bodies (e.g. as welfare scroungers) onto those of people of color and/or immigrants. Through this performative act, we see how, at least in the case of North America and the UK, the “mythical norm” (Lorde, 1984) works to secure racial affinity between white communities and the powers of the nation-state. To further illustrate, mainstream LGBT movements and queer organizing have often been complicit in perpetuating white supremacy, racial capitalism, and, as Puar (2007) emphasizes, homonationalism and homonormativity: that is, the promotion of the good gay citizen as white, gender-normative, Christian, cisgender, and male (see also Harsin, 2018; Hatfield, 2018).

Populist slogans, e.g. “British jobs for British workers” (Shabi, 2017) also summon a desire for closing borders, recalling a “past-truth” when the nation was imagined as racially pure (read:

white), free from the “wrong” types of migrants (meaning: those positioned as unassimilated to the dominant “values” of the nation). But, significantly, these slogans and connected border control policies are based, in Trumpian language, on “alternative facts” (Bradner, 2017) and inadequate accounts of the past. They do not address the long histories and presence of people of color, the indigenous communities destroyed through forms of settler-colonialism across Western nations, nor the hetero-patriarchal capitalist systems that fuels globalization and drives further g/local inequalities. Sadly, as Azmanova (2018, p.401) argues:

even the most derided forms of recent populist mobilizations (those by the anti-immigrant far right) have used successfully the channels of electoral politics, which has allowed them to affect not only specific policies, but to influence the whole policy agenda in Western democracies.

No longer the out-dated politics of “the nasty party” (e.g. the British political parties of UKIP and the BNP), anti-foreigner sentiments have become mainstream, as fear of losing electoral votes has effectively forced many centre-left and centre-right parties to absorb them (Valluvan, 2017). Thus, hosted by the institutional framework of liberal democracies, the radical (and racist) voice of populism is having real political purchase; it is effectively regenerating the dynamics of supposedly fair, democratic politics.

In a supposedly fair, “post-racist” society, the ongoing denial of racism and white supremacist ethno-nationalist discriminatory politics is evidence of what Lentin and Titley (2011) call “post-racialism”. They argue that post-racialism situates race as an empty signifier, and residual acts of racism as free from any deeper racial context. It resembles, as Bonilla-Silva (2007), Burdsey (2016), and Meghji and Saini (2018) remind us, the premise of racism without racist. Through the (problematic) logic of post-racialism, race is evacuated at the very moment of

its emergence; that is, as a foundational element of ethno-national populist politics. Both those in power *and* subjugated communities can also potentially embody the mythical norm of post-racialism in ways they do not even often realize (Lorde, 1984). In and across various sites of leisure, people of colour and migrants become key actors in the reproduction of racist ethno-national populist politics. For example, as Ratna (2018) argues, first-generation Gujarati Indian citizens of the UK must continue to negotiate their precarious senses of citizenship even although their legal status has already been granted (see Bhambra, 2017), using dominant supposedly non-racial tropes about citizenship, belonging and “values” of the nation (see also Jones *et al*, 2017) in and through their engagements in walking as an informal leisure pastime. Some racialized groups in turn use ethno-nationalist and individualised discourses as a tactic to continually reproduce their citizenship as hard-working “good” migrants rather than supposedly lazy and welfare-scrounging “bad” ones. In the British context, at different moments of time, and in differential ways, those people may include Muslim communities, Eastern Europeans, African, African Caribbean groups, and lower-class and lower-caste South Asian groups (whoever they, respectively, may be imagined to be). Thus, even practices of resistance unintentionally can incorporate and reinforce exclusionary language and racialised systems of power. Conversely, we have also seen the rise of the Democratic Football Lads Alliance, which represents a sport and leisure based manifestation of white populist politics. This organization claims to be “protesting against ‘returning jihadists’, ‘thousands of Awol migrants’, ‘rape gangs and groomers’ and ‘veterans treated like traitors’”, but has been identified by anti-racist groups as, in reality, propagating racism, Islamophobia, and a supposed war against terror (Gayle, 2018). Critically navigating post-racial logics during neoliberal times can be tricky, and it is not our intention to reduce racisms to simply the actions of rogue or self-serving individuals (and/or collectives), but to view them as systemic, complex, and

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connected to wider geo-political conditions and evolving histories (Alexander, 2016; Valluvan, 2016). We concur with Valluvan’s contention (2016), that neo-liberal post-racist times are, in fact, captured through the proposition “racisms without racism”. In other word, masking the continuities of cultural and biological racisms, and, as we would add, institutional racisms.

This timely special issue is situated within, and writes against, a contemporary consolidation and expansion of white supremacist, ethno-nationalist, anti-immigrant, neoliberal and neoimperial / neocolonial regimes and discourses across Europe, in the United States, and in many countries in the Global South. The papers in this special issue showcase the constant tension and unfinished (racial, classed, gendered, ethnic, and sexual) projects embedded in national populist politics. They consider on-the-ground analyses of power asymmetries and forms of populism that manifest and are resisted in/through leisure, uncovering and critically analyzing macro-micro levels of resistance, the management of power, and localized experiences of solidarity, conviviality and pleasure.

**(Re)politicizing race, racism and resistance in leisure studies**

We must take into account and understand the power asymmetries and forms of national populism through a critical engagement with the materialities of race. By politicizing and naming race, racism, leisure studies, and national populism, we foreground race as central to the production of nation, populism, and belonging in this sphere of popular culture (Alexander, 2016; Burdsey, 2016). Thus, we, as the co-authors and co-editors, underscore race as one key facet of leisure and its relationship to national populism. “If we are correct about the depth of the rightward turn,” writes Stuart Hall (1979, p.15), “then our interventions need to be pertinent, decisive and



effective.” We locate leisure as a significant and timely medium, means, and method for these interventions to take place. In this special issue, we, the co-editors, along with the authors, are specifically interested in existing and new forms and cultures of leisure, sport and physical activity that remake, reframe, and interrogate racial belonging locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

We also perceive this special issue of *Leisure Studies* as an opportunity both to *foreground* and *(re)politicize* the debate around race and racism in leisure studies (Carrington, 2004, 2012), which, we would argue, is often ignored and/or treated uncritically in the contemporary field; unnamed or subsumed within concepts such as nation, culture, identity and super-diversity (see also Nayak and Meer, 2015). It is critical to centralize and name race in relation to the contemporary socio-political conjuncture as a site and setting for leisure for a number of reasons. The conditions of austerity re/produced and reinforced by these politics have a disproportionate negative effect on people of color (Bhambra, 2017). More worryingly, in the UK, for example, the post-Brexit climate has seen a rapid and substantive rise in racially motivated hate crimes. As Jon Burnett (2017, p.89) notes, “the racist violence that has followed the [Brexit] referendum is not a just a ‘spike’, a ‘jump’ or a ‘spate’, as the mainstream consensus has it. It is the literal manifestation of the political climate which sustains it”. Placing race at the center of our analysis is also required to write against the interpretative sleight-of-hand that has sought to deracialize the rationales and underpinnings of contemporary populism. As Gurminder Bhambra (2017) identifies astutely, the ways in which the so-called socio-economic “left-behinds” – the communities erroneously held (solely) responsible for the Brexit vote and Trump election – are racialised as white, has significant consequences. Not only are minority ethnic groups and people of colour erased from any notion of working-class consciousness or politics (Shilliam, 2018; Virdee, 2014), but this rhetoric “further

displaces structures of racialized inequality from the conversation, seeking, as it does, to make white working-class identity, and not structural issues of relative advantage and disadvantage, the primary issue in explanations of the outcome” (Bhambra, 2017, p.218-19); see also Valluvan, 2017). Put simply, we are living in/through an epoch where race structures a majority of contemporary despotic regimes and g/local conversations, and the role of academic work in illuminating, mapping, and challenging them is paramount.

By underscoring race, we aim to highlight the ways in which leisure practices incorporate various axes, categories, and mediums to invigorate and substantiate racial classifications – including those that work outside the western lexicon of race and intelligibility. In the process of foregrounding race, we aim to highlight how it gains traction through the interjection of class, gender, sexuality, religion, and multiple politics of location. Beyond the high-profile example from professional sport we discussed to begin this conversation, the role and significance of broader, grassroots forms of *leisure* in resisting (or indeed reinforcing) contemporary forms of populism, authoritarianism, and ethno-nationalism is arguably not yet fully explored and understood analytically. This is perhaps surprising, given the myriad other forms of resistance we have witnessed over the last couple of years, popular cultural or otherwise (Boone *et al*, 2018; Thangaraj 2015; Thangaraj *et al*, 2016). As Diana Parry and colleagues articulate, “leisure is a context where people can create changes that may bring about a more socially just world, and the research we conduct brings visibility to these efforts” (Parry *et al*, 2013, p.83). For us, emphasizing notions of resistance, racial and non-racial, in this special issue is of utmost importance – *intellectually* and *politically*. As Susan Shaw (2006: 533) articulates:

The idea of leisure as resistance raises questions about the political nature of leisure, and particularly about human agency, power, and social and cultural change. In this sense, resistance is not a neutral term that can be easily added to or dropped from the analysis of leisure at will (as in “add resistance and stir”). Rather, it forces researchers to address not only theoretical questions about paradigmatic assumptions, but also political questions about the purpose and role of social research, about social action, and about praxis.

With this in mind, the questions, challenges and opportunities addressed in this collection expand, rather than restrict, the connection between leisure and national populism while making sure not to center the West as the only site of knowledge production. In the process, readers will uncover the various ways through which the authors challenge not only leisure in the Global North but also western epistemologies.

### **Overview of the papers**

The papers in this special issue address leisure in a multitude of ways. Ali Greey (2018) focuses on white supremacist tendencies within the supposedly liberal tradition of LGBT Pride events through a consideration of both queer and mainstream media responses to a BlackLivesMatter protest at 2016’s Pride Toronto march. Despite having been designated an “Honoured Group” by Pride Toronto in 2016, members of BLM-Toronto were categorized as criminal, “terrorist,” aggressive outsiders for holding a non-violent sit-in at the Pride parade, where they demanded more resources for black queer and trans people, and the dis-inclusion of police officers in the parade. Using Queer of Color Critique (Ferguson, 2004; Johnson, 2003; Manalansan, 2003; Reddy, 2011), Greey exposes the racist politics of exclusion, especially of queers of color, that structure

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the event in concept as well as outcome. In the process, Greey carefully underlines the nefarious homonationalist and homonormative politics that govern the leisure spaces of gay parades, while importantly accounting for racial politics within the LGBTQI community.

When “alternative facts” become commonsensical and taken-for-granted realms of “truth”, spaces of leisure offer the venue to shore up or challenge neoconservative ideologies. As Gabby Yearwood (2018) illustrates in his analysis of the University of Texas-Austin game song and corresponding rituals, institutional narratives transform myths into socio-historical facts that gain the power of “truth” through the force of tradition. Such acts, as also shown in the work on collegiate and professional mascots in the U.S. sporting landscape (Guiliano, 2015; King, 2016; Spindel, 2006), validate the performance of tradition while suppressing forms of protest. Through the voices of African American players, fans, cheerleaders, and other sport participants, Yearwood provides a critically important intervention into how white supremacist anti-black rhetoric is transformed and differently coded to foreground university tradition and state pride.

Brian Kumm and Corey Johnson focus upon a different leisure space altogether: the domestic and informal leisure space of “the next-door neighbour’s lawn”. Using a post-qualitative enquiry, they offer a narrative that “plays” with the lived affects of neoliberal populism in the U.S. In framing this often taken-for-granted realm of leisure, they make visible (and audible) how patterns of everyday life (Duneier, 2000), street-level rhythms, sounds, smells, spaces, politics and racial scripts (Anderson, 2000) offer the opportunity to decipher and resist manifestations of national populist politics. Through the trickster character Phillip, and a musical interlude, they alert the reader to the experiential level of embodying and evoking social

change. The authors provide a compelling narrative, arguing how close attention to lived racial (and intersectional) affects, of themselves and the matters around them (where the human is just one form), everyday flows of power can be more consciously re-played in different and subversive ways. Their invitation to play is part of a broader disciplinary and political dialogue to generate ways of knowing which, crucially, challenge the everyday racial sediments of national populist politics in/through the context of leisure.

Similarly addressing localized spaces of leisure, Verena Lenneis and Sine Agergaard (2018) focus upon community action as a means to challenge municipal control and policy-making. Their post-colonial feminist interrogation reveals how both white Danish and Muslim citizens' access to women-only public swimming sessions is limited by municipal policies about the antithetical relationship between religious modesty and Danish liberalism (across both left-wing and right-wing party positionings). Their analysis, during this time of the "global war on terror" (Rana, 2011), provides critical interventions for understanding the local, national, and global context of Muslim bodies and Muslim aesthetics (Abu-Lughod, 2013). Their analysis makes vivid how different women's leisure is limited by critically exposing the ethno-nationalist populism embedded within official records of municipal policy-making processes.

Veena Mani and Mathangi Krishnamurthy (2018) write on football and space (Sen, 2015) in the South Indian state of Kerala, where grassroots organizing challenged the city corporation's and state government's aim to replace the football pitch with a slaughterhouse. While the fundamentalist Hindu national government (headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party) in India has pushed for neoliberal policies coded through the language of regaining Hindu rights, the protest by football fans shows a vibrant space of "active citizenry" to resist top-down dictates during a time of increased Hindu, upper-class, and upper-caste fundamentalism (Kamath, forthcoming). As

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Mani and Krishnamurthy show, critical analysis of national populism must account for g/local challenges and forms of protest. The non-essentialist character of leisure and national populism also requires that we expand upon how we conceptualize protest.

Heather Sykes and Manal Hamzeh (2018) intervene against accounts of leisure that naturalize the nation and nation-state by foregrounding indigeneity and histories of settler-colonialism, and locate the colonial epistemologies within the western academy that further silence native, First Nation, and indigenous truths, histories, and claims to land. They adopt four different ways of theorizing anti-colonialism and decolonialization, offering a critique of how the construction of leisure and mega-sporting events involves various types of forgetting and amnesia. By doing so, they offer a method of researching leisure using a decolonial, anti-essentialist framework (Smith, 2002) that attends to longer histories, contemporary populist formations in sport, and struggles for identity. In the process, while situating the importance of anti-colonial perspectives to provide important critique to settler-colonialism, they foreground the importance of the land and redistributing it back to native communities as the important work of decolonialization.

The article by Rodrigo Tramutolo Navarro, Daniella Tschöke and Simone Rechia (2018) provides a timely consideration of the relationship between urbanization, public space and leisure. Using a case study of the implementation of the Praça de Bolso do Ciclista in the city of Curitiba, Brazil, this paper reveals how the construction of even a small leisure space can challenge the hegemony of neoliberal planning practices and dominant discourses about uses of, and rights to, the city. Notably, Navarro and colleagues highlight the role of two cycling groups in the process of creating this space, the CicloIguaçu – Association of Cyclists of Alto Iguaçu, and Bicicletaria Cultural. Using a range of qualitative methods – including documents and reports, observations,

visual records and interviews – to trace the participatory process through which the Praça de Bolso do Ciclista was planned and implemented, this article illuminates how collective power can lead to the transformation of social space in the city. In doing so, it reminds us the subversive potential of leisure practices and participants in resisting contemporary globalised neoliberal urban politics (Harvey, 2006; Soja, 2010).

**Re-Imagining National Populist Projects**

At the time of completing this introduction to our special issue, in September 2018, Colin Kaepernick was selected by sports apparel manufacturers, Nike, as one of its icons for the 30th anniversary celebrations of its ‘Just Do it’ campaign (Carrington and Boykoff, 2018). When even the man who has become a g/local figurehead for confronting the long history of racism in the US is “bedfellows” with a transnational, corporate, capitalist and patriarchal sports manufacturer known for the exploitation of workers from the Global South, the following question emerges: how as individuals, communities and citizens can we resist and fight the seeming ubiquity of neoliberal and racialised forces of control and power? While Kaepernick and Nike’s relationship does bring about greater awareness of BlackLivesMatter and the rights of athletes, this is a complex situation. At this time, the cultural critique and politics of Stuart Hall (and others) seem to be more poignant than ever before (Carrington, 2018). In proposing a vision for society after neoliberal (national populist) political times, Hall *et al* (2015) argue that this will not necessarily be achieved by a single means (or by one elite individual/sportsperson); rather, it will take forms of action that address the multiple, social and economic complexities of “common-sense” populism as expressed across different g/local sites, spaces of leisure, work, culture and everyday life, by various institutions and agents. Breaking the omnipresent forceful lock of radical right/mainstream ethno-

nationalist politics calls for – in the words of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) – “a thousand plateaus”; an infinite number of spaces and places “within which a society’s future can be imagined, fought over, and determined” (Hall *et al* 2015, p.219). In adding our voices to this mission through the context of leisure, and those of the contributing authors – through our united, separate and diverse academic activisms, scholarship and community work – we too seek to challenge, struggle for, and overturn contemporary fruitions of commonsense “values” of “the people” to advocate for a philosophy of “deep democracy” (ibid.); that is, arguing for a society based on shared notions of fairness and economic redistribution as well as historical, racial, intersectional, political recognition and representation (see also Fraser, 2008). The papers that we present participate in that project by naming the national populist movements in various sites while offering us, through such critique, a space to organize, struggle, and reimagine leisure as spaces for justice, equality, and equity.

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